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law by the suggestions of reason and experience, and by the aid of other systems, as to lead to results interesting to all who speak the English language and are governed by laws of English origin.

ART. V.—*Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son. Wholesale, Retail, and for Exportation.* By CHARLES DICKENS. New York: John Wiley. 1848. 2 vols. 12mo.

MUCH has been said and written on the uses and abuses of fiction. Novel-writing and novel-reading have commonly been held in low estimation by grave and sensible people, or rather by people whose gravity has been received as the appropriate garment of sense. Many are both amused, and ashamed of being amused, by this class of compositions; and, accordingly, in the libraries of well-regulated families, untouched volumes of history and philosophy glitter on prominent book-shelves in all the magnificence of burnished bindings, while the poor, precious novel, dog's-eared and wasted as it may be by constant handling, is banished to some secret but accessible nook, in order that its modest merit may not evoke polite horror. It thus becomes a kind of humble companion, whose prattle is pleasant enough when alone, but who must be cut in genteel company. And thus, many a person whose heart is beating hard in admiration of Mr. Richard Turpin's ride to York, or whose imagination is filled with the image of Mr. James's solitary horseman slowly wending up the hill, still in public vehemently chatters on subjects with which he has no sympathy, and on books which he has never read.

Against good novels, that is, against vivid representations or idealizations of life, character, and manners, in this or in any past age, there would seem to be no valid objection; but this department of literature has unfortunately been a domain in which the whole hosts of folly, stupidity, and immorality have encamped. A good portion of the feeble things purporting to be novels are bad, and some of them execrably

bad. Ink-wasters, who could write nothing else, whom nature never intended to write any thing, have still considered themselves abundantly qualified to write fiction ; consequently, all the nonsense and fat-wittedness in poor perverted human nature have been fully represented in the congress of romance. Of all printed books that ever vexed the wise, and charmed the foolish, a bad novel is probably that which best displays how far the mind can descend in the sliding scale of sense and nature. In the art of embodying imbecility of thought and pettiness of sentiment in a style correspondingly mean and gauzy, all other men and women have been fairly distanced by certain novelists not altogether unblessed now with popularity and influence.

This fact brings us to the distinctions existing between the widely different works classed under the common name of novels ; namely, novels written by men of genius, novels written by commonplace men, and novels written by dunces. Commonplace and stupid novels, and commonplace and stupid admirers of them, every community can boast of possessing ; but prose fictions of the higher class are rare. When, however, a man of genius embodies his mind in this form, it is ridiculous to allow any prejudice against the name to prevent us from acquiring the knowledge and enjoying the delight he is able to convey. If he be a great novelist, we may be sure that he has succeeded in a department of letters requiring a richly-gifted mind and heart ; and that his success entitles him to some of the proudest honors of the intellect.

The novel, indeed, is one of the most effective, if not most perfect forms of composition, through which a comprehensive mind can communicate itself to the world, exhibiting, as it may, through sentiment, incident, and character, a complete philosophy of life, and admitting a dramatic and narrative expression of the abstract principles of ethics, metaphysics, and theology. Its range is theoretically as wide and deep as man and nature. Life is its subject, life in all its changes and modifications by climate, by national and local manners, by conventional usages, by individual peculiarities, by distance in time and space, by every influence, in short, operating on the complex nature of man. It is the most difficult of all modes of composition, for, in its perfection, it requires

a mind capable of perceiving and representing all varieties of life and character, of being tolerant to all, and of realizing them to the eye and heart, with vivid and vital truth. The great novelist should be a poet, philosopher, and man of the world, fused into one. Understanding man as well as men, the elements of human nature as well as the laws of their combinations, he should possess the most extensive practical knowledge of society, the most universal sympathies with his kind, and a nature at once shrewd and impassioned, observant and creative, with large faculties harmoniously balanced. His enthusiasm should never hurry him into bigotry of any kind, not even into bigoted hatred of bigotry ; for, never appearing personally in his work as the champion of any of his characters, representing all faithfully, and studious to give even Satan his due, he must simply exhibit things in their right relations, and trust that morality of effect will result from truth of representation.

It is evident that this exacting ideal of a novelist has never been realized. In most of the novels written by men of powerful talents, we have but eloquent expressions of one-sided views of life. In some, the author represents himself, ideals of himself, and negations of himself, instead of mankind. Others are rhetorical addresses in favor of vice or virtue, religion or irreligion, clumsily cast into a narrative and colloquial form, in which we view the abstract feebly struggling after the concrete, but unable to achieve its laudable purpose. In some novels of a higher grade, we notice a predominance of the poetical, or philanthropic, or moral element, and though in these we have pictures, the author constantly appears as showman. Perhaps Scott, of all novelists, approaches nearest to the ideal, as far as his perceptions in the material and spiritual world extended. Whatever lay on the broad mirror of his imagination he fairly painted ; but there were many things which that mirror, glorious as it was, did not reflect. Fielding, within the range of his mind, approaches nearer absolute perfection ; and if he had possessed as keen a sense of the supernatural as the natural, he might have taken the highest rank among great constructive and creative minds ; but he had no elevation of soul, and little power of depicting it in imagination. As it is, however, the life-like reality of the characters and scenes he has painted

indicates that his genius was bounded by nothing but his sentiments.

Although English literature is now, in respect to novels of character and manners, the richest in the world, we still find that the novel had not acquired much eminence as a department of imaginative literature until about the middle of the last century. Prose fiction was generally abandoned to writers who lacked the ability to embody their folly or indecency in verse. Richardson was the first man of genius who put forth his whole strength in this department of composition ; and Fielding began his admirable series of fictions rather with the design of ridiculing Richardson than to form a new school of novelists. Smollett, without possessing Fielding's depth and geniality of nature, or Richardson's intense sentiment and hold upon the passions, still exhibited so large a knowledge of the world, such immense fertility of invention, such skill in the delineation of humorists, and such power in awakening both laughter and terror, that his works, though vitiated by the caustic bitterness of his temper, and by a misanthropic vulgarity calculated to inspire disgust rather than pleasure, have won for him a position side by side with Richardson and Fielding, as the founder of an influential school of novelists. Following these great men in rapid succession came Sterne, Goldsmith, Charles Johnstone, Fanny Burney, Walpole, Clara Reeves, Robert Bage, Mackenzie, and Mrs. Radcliffe, each of them possessing a vein of originality, and occupying some new department of fiction ; and two of them, Sterne and Goldsmith, establishing a renown which promises to survive all mutations of taste. As the tone of morality and delicacy in works of fiction varies with the moral variations of society, and as the Anglo-Saxon mind seems penetrated by an ineradicable love of coarseness, the writings of many mentioned on our list are not particularly characterized by decorum. Indeed, until Miss Burney began to write, in 1778, decency was not considered a necessary ingredient of romance. Richardson has a minute and ludicrously formal method of dwelling upon licentious situations, and Fielding and Smollett include a considerable amount of profanity and ribaldry, which the least prudish reader must pronounce superfluous. The dunces, as a matter of course, adopted, with some additions, the vulgarity of their betters,

and superadded large quantities of stupidity from their own minds. Novels, therefore, soon came under the ban of the religious and prudent; anathemas were freely launched against them from the fireside and the pulpit; and parents might be excused for some bitterness of invective transcending the cool judgments of criticism, especially if a son was engaged in running the career of Peregrine Pickle, or a daughter was emulating the little eccentricities of Lady Betty Careless.

But about the beginning of the present century a new order of fictions came into fashion. As novelties commonly succeed with the public, some enterprising authors tried the speculation of discarding indecency. Sentimentality, the opposite evil, was substituted, and the dynasty of rakes was succeeded by the dynasty of flats. Lady Jane Brazenface, the former heroine, abdicated in favor of Lady Arabella Dieaway. The bold, free, reckless libertine of the previous romances now gave way to a lavendered young gentleman, the very pink and essence of propriety, faultless in features and in morals, and the undisputed proprietor of crushed affections and about two thousand sterling a year. The inspiration of this tribe of novelists was love and weak tea; the soul-shattering period of courtship was their field of action. Considered as a mirror of actual life, this school was inferior to the worst specimens of that which it supplanted; for the human race deserves this equivocal compliment to its intelligence, that it has more rogues than sentimentalists. However, the thing, bad as it was, had its day. Santo Sebastiano, Thaddeus of Warsaw, *The Children of the Abbey*, and other dispensations of a similar kind, exercised the despotism of sentimental cant over the circulating libraries, and their painfully perfect Matildas, Annas, Theresas, and Lauras became the ideal of the sex. It is evident that these novels, as we see them now enveloped in their moist atmosphere of sickly sensibility, required the smallest capital of intelligence that ever sufficed for the business of literature. A hero, whose duty it was to suffer impossible things and say foolish ones; a heroine, oscillating between elegant miseries and genteel ecstasies; a testy old father, from whom the gout occasionally forces a scrap of reason; a talkative maiden aunt, who imagines the hero to be in love with herself; a

pert chambermaid, who fibs and cheats for her mistress, and, at the same time, looks after some John or Peter on whom her own undying affections have settled ; and a deep villain, who is the only sensible person in the book ; — these shadows of character, which the author has the impertinence to call men and women, joined to an unlimited power to create and demolish fortunes, constitute about all the matter we have been able to find in some scores of these novels. The style is commonly sprinkled with a kind of interjectional pathos, consisting mainly of a frequent repetition of *ah !* and *oh !* The whole wretched mixture, despicable in every respect, still passed for many years, with far the larger portion of the reading public, for the genuine expression of the human heart and imagination.

It is principally from this vapid class of novels that the contemporary parental objection to works of fiction has arisen. Even at the period of their popularity, they were esteemed mostly by persons at a certain age of life and a certain stage of intellectual development ; and there are doubtless many still living who can recollect the indignation with which the master and the mistress of a family beheld their entrance into the house.

But these fictions all fled like mists before the sun, when Scott appeared with *Waverley*. Since then, the novel has risen to a new importance in literature, and exerted a great influence upon departments of intellectual labor with which it seems to have little in common. Thierry, one of the greatest of modern historians, confesses that the reading of *Ivanhoe* revealed to him the proper method of historical composition. From being the weak companion of the laziest hours of the laziest people, the novel, under the impulse it received from Scott, became the illustrator of history, the mirror and satirist of manners, the vehicle of controverted opinions in philosophy, politics, and religion. In its delineations of character and its romantic and heroical incidents, it took the place of the drama and the epic. But in becoming the most popular mode of communication with the public, it induced an indiscriminate rush of mediocrity and charlatanism into romance, so great as almost to overwhelm the talent and genius travelling in the same path. In addition to this multitude of rogues and dunces, there was another multitude of preachers and contro-

versialists, eager to inculcate some system, good or bad, relating to other departments of literature, and who should have written treatises and sermons instead of novels. Mr. Plumer Ward desires to answer some arguments against Christianity, and forthwith publishes a novel. Professor Sewall has a dislike to the law of supply and demand, hates Lord John Russell and Sir Robert Peel, and considers Romanists and Dissenters as criminals; and the result of these opinions and antipathies is a novel. Dr. Croly desires to give a narrative of some political and military events, and to analyze the characters of some prominent statesmen of the present century, and he accordingly declaims, rhapsodizes, and pastes the purple patches of his rhetoric on a long colloquial dissertation, and calls the agglomeration a novel. There is, of course, no objection to the matter of these works, provided it were treated dramatically; but this substitution of opinions for characters and incidents is altogether from the purpose of novel writing.

Of these various classes of fiction, that which, next to Scott's, attained for a few years the most popularity and influence was the school of Bulwer, or the novel of fashionable life. The publication of *Pelham* heralded a new intellectual dynasty of fops and puppies. Bulwer's original idea of a hero was the greatest satire ever written by a man of talent on his own lack of mental elevation. He attempted to realize in a fictitious character his notion of what a man should be, and accordingly produced a strange medley of qualities called *Pelham*, in which the dandy, the scholar, the sentimentalist, the statesman, the *roué*, and the blackguard, were all to be included in one "many-sided" man, whose merits would win equal applause from the hearty and the heartless, the lover and the libertine. Among these, however, the dandy stood preëminent, and scholarship, sentiment, politics, licentiousness, and ruffianism were all bedizened in the frippery of *Almacks*. To this character, Bulwer added another, who may be described in general terms as a man burning with hatred and revenge, misanthropical and moody, whose life had been blasted by some terrible wrong, and whose miserable hours were devoted to plots, curses, lamentations, and "convulsing" his face. These two types of character, the one unskilfully copied from *Don Juan*, the other from *Lara*, both

of them Byronic as far as Bulwer could understand Byron, reappeared, like ghosts of ghosts, in most of his succeeding novels. However much his mind may have grown, and his experience of life increased, since his first plunge into romance, he has never yet fully emancipated himself from these original shackles. Indeed, Bulwer is rather an eloquent and accomplished rhetorician than a delineator of life and character. His intellect and feelings are both narrowed by his personal character, and things which clash with his individual tastes he criticizes rather than delineates. Every thing that he touches is Bulwerized. A man of large acquirements, and ever ready to copy or pilfer from other authors, he discolors all that he borrows. The two sisters in Eugene Aram are copied directly from Scott's Minna and Brenda Troil, and their relative position is preserved ; but throughout there is manifested an inability to preserve the features of the originals in their purity, and accordingly their natural bloom soon changes to fashionable *rouge*. That a man thus without humor and dramatic imagination should be able to attain a wide reputation as a novelist, is a triumph of pretension which must give delight to all engaged in experimenting on the discrimination of the public. If we compare him with any novelist possessing a vivid perception of the real, in actual or imaginary life, we see instantly the gulf which separates his splendid narrative essays from true novels ; and his unreal mockeries of men and women, quickly passing from individualities into generalizations, stand out as embodied opinions on life and character, not representations of life and character.

In regard to the question which has been raised as to the morality of Bulwer's fictions, it is hardly possible for any person who, in reading a book, is accustomed to observe the biases of the author's mind, to come but to one conclusion. Their general tendency is not only immoral, but it is evident that the writer plumes himself on being superior to that vulgar code of practical ethics which keeps society from falling to pieces ; and, in its place, he favors us with a far more elegant system, of which the prominent principle is a morbid voluptuousness, compounded of sensuality and noble sentiments, and admitting many resounding epithets of virtue and religion when they will serve either to dignify a meanness or point a period. To those who have no objection to devils provided

they are painted, this peculiar form of morality may have its attractions. Considered in relation to Bulwer's mind, it is one illustration of his defects as a novelist, especially as it indicates his lack of intellectual conscientiousness, of that fine sagacity which detects the false through all disguises, and seizes on the true and real with the felicity and speed of instinct. Without this genius for the truth, no novelist can succeed in a consistent exhibition of character ; and its absence in Bulwer is the cause of the unnatural mixture of vices and virtues in the personages of his novels. In the present day, at least, when immorality is not of itself a passport to popularity, moral obliquity ever indicates an intellectual defect.

The success of Bulwer stirred the emulation of a crowd of imitators, and for a considerable period the domain of fiction was deluged by a flood of fashionable novels. Bulwer possessed shining talents, if not a kind of morbid genius ; but most of those who followed in his wake produced a class of vapid fictions, full of puppyism and conceit, illumined by hardly a ray of common sense or moral sense, and as unparalleled in their dulness as in their debility. How such dreary trash contrived to find readers is one of those unexplained mental phenomena not solvable by any received theory of the mind. Fashionable life is, at the best, but a perversion of life, and represents human nature in one of its most unnatural attitudes ; but still it is life, and affords a fair, though limited field for light satire and sketches of character. The authorlings who essayed to delineate it, from their parlors or their garrets, brought to the task a large stock of impudence and French phrases, perfect freedom from moral obligations, a weakness of feeling which it would be a compliment to call feminine, and an extensive acquaintance with the modes and mysteries of wearing apparel. The drawing-room and the boudoir, the coxcomb's drawl and the fine lady's simper, white waistcoats and top-boots, — these were their inspiring themes. The leading merit of these authors consisted in their complete knowledge of clothes ; their leading defect, in forgetting to put men and women into them. Lady Montague, in reference to a titled family of her day named Hervey, said that God had created men, women, and Herveys. The fashionable novelists delineated the Herveys.

About the time that this way of writing nonsense had lost

its attractiveness, and every respectable critic welcomed each new specimen of it with an ominous exclamation of disgust, Charles Dickens appeared with the *Pickwick Papers*. The immediate and almost unprecedented popularity he attained was owing not more to his own genius than to the general contempt for the school he supplanted. After ten years of conventional frippery and foppery, it was a relief to have once more a view of the earth and firmament, — to feel once more one of those touches of nature “which make the whole world kin.” Here was a man, at last, with none of the daintiness of genteel society in his manner, belonging to no clique or sect, with sympathies embracing widely varying conditions of humanity, and whose warm heart and observant eye had been collecting from boyhood those impressions of man and nature, which afterwards gushed out in exquisite descriptions of natural scenery, or took shape in his *Pickwicks*, *Wellers*, *Vardens*, *Pecksniffs*, and their innumerable brotherhood.

Dickens as a novelist and prose poet is to be classed in the front rank of the noble company to which he belongs. He has revived the novel of genuine practical life, as it existed in the works of *Fielding*, *Smollett*, and *Goldsmith*; but at the same time has given to his materials an individual coloring and expression peculiarly his own. His characters, like those of his great exemplars, constitute a world of their own, whose truth to nature every reader instinctively recognizes in connection with their truth to Dickens. *Fielding* delineates with more exquisite art, standing more as the spectator of his personages, and commenting on their actions with an ironical humor and a seeming innocence of insight, which pierces not only into, but through, their very nature, laying bare their inmost unconscious springs of action, and in every instance indicating that he understands them better than they understand themselves. It is this perfection of knowledge and insight which gives to his novels their naturalness, their freedom of movement, and their value as lessons in human nature as well as consummate representations of actual life. Dickens’s eye for the forms of things is as accurate as *Fielding*’s, and his range of vision more extended; but he does not probe so profoundly into the heart of what he sees, and he is more led away from the simplicity of truth by a tricky spirit of fantastic exaggeration. Mentally he is indisputably below

Fielding ; but in tenderness, in pathos, in sweetness and purity of feeling, in that comprehensiveness of sympathy which springs from a sense of brotherhood with mankind, he is as indisputably above him.

The tendency of Dickens's genius, both in delineating the actual and the imaginary, is to personify, to individualize. This makes his page all alive with character. Not only does he never treat of man in the abstract, but he gives personality to the rudest shows of nature, every thing he touches becoming symbolic of human sympathies or antipathies. There is no writer more deficient in generalization. His comprehensiveness is altogether of the heart ; but that heart, like the intelligence of Bacon's cosmopolite, is not "an island cut off from other men's lands, but a continent which joins to them." His observation of life thus beginning and ending with individuals, it seems strange that those highly sensitive and patriotic Americans, who paid him the compliment of flying into a passion with his peevish remarks on our institutions, should have overlooked the fact that his mind was altogether destitute of the generalizing qualities of a statesman, and that an angry humorist might have made equally ludicrous pictures of any existing society. When his work on America was quoted in the French Chamber of Deputies, M. de Tocqueville ridiculed the notion that any opinions of Mr. Dickens should be referred to in that place as authoritative. There is a great difference between the criticism of a statesman and the laughter of a tourist, especially when the tourist laughs not from his heart, but his bile. The statesman passes over individual peculiarities to seize on general principles, while the whole force of the other lies in the description of individual peculiarities. Dickens, detecting with the nicest tact the foibles of men, and capable of setting forth our Bevans, Colonel Tompkinses, and Jefferson Bricks in all the comic splendor of humorous exaggeration, is still unqualified to abstract a general idea of national character from his observation of persons. A man immeasurably inferior to him in creative genius, might easily excel him in that operation of the mind. Indeed, were Dickens's understanding as comprehensive as his heart, and as vigorous as his fancy, he would come near realizing the ideal of a novelist ; but as it is, it is as ridiculous to be angry with any generalizations of his on American institu-

tions and politics, as it would be to inveigh against him for any heresies he might blunder into about innate ideas, the freedom of the will, or original sin. Besides, as Americans, we have a decided advantage over our trans-Atlantic friends, even in the matter of being caricatured by the novelist whom both are rivals in admiring; for certainly, if there be any character in which Dickens has seized on a national trait, that character is Pecksniff, and that national trait is English.

The whole originality and power of Dickens lie in this instinctive perception of individual character, to which we have already referred. He has gleaned all his facts from observation and sympathy, in a diligent scrutiny of actual life, and no contemporary author is less indebted to books. His style is all his own, its quaint texture of fancy and humor being spun altogether from his own mind, with hardly a verbal felicity which bears the mark of being stolen. In painting character, he is troubled by no uneasy sense of himself. When he is busy with Sam Weller or Mrs. Nickleby, he forgets Charles Dickens. Not taking his own character as the test of character, but entering with genial warmth into the peculiarities of others, and making their joys and sorrows his own, his perceptions are not bounded by his personality, but continually apprehend and interpret new forms of individual being; and thus his mind, by the readiness with which it genially assimilates other minds, and the constancy with which it is fixed on objects external to itself, grows with every exercise of its powers. By this felicity of nature, the man who began his literary life with a condemned farce, a mediocre opera, and some slight sketches of character, written in a style which but feebly indicated the germs of genius, produced, before the expiration of eight years, *The Pickwick Papers*, *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and *Martin Chuzzlewit*, in a continually ascending scale of intellectual excellence, and achieved a fame not only gladly recognized wherever the English tongue was spoken, but which extended into France, Germany, Italy, and Holland, and caused the translation of his works into languages of which he hardly understood a word. Had he been an egotist, devoured by a ravenous vanity for personal display, and eager to print the image of himself on the popular imagination, his talents would hardly have made him

known beyond the street in which he lived, and his mind by self-admiration would soon have been self-consumed. His fellow-feeling with his race is his genius.

The humanity, the wide-ranging and healthy sympathies, and, especially, the recognition of the virtues which obtain among the poor and humble, so observable in the works of Dickens, are in a great degree characteristic of the age, and without them popularity can hardly be won in imaginative literature. The sentiment of humanity, indeed, or a hypocritical affectation of it, has become infused into almost all literature and speech, from the sermons of Dr. Channing to the *feuilletons* of Eugene Sue. It is exceedingly difficult for a man to be as selfish and as narrow as he could have been had he lived a century ago. No matter how bigoted may be the tendencies of his nature, no matter how strong may be his desire to dwell in a sulky isolation from his race, he cannot breathe the atmosphere of his time without feeling occasionally a generous sentiment springing to his lips, without perceiving occasionally a liberal opinion stealing into his understanding. He cannot creep into any nook or corner of seclusion, but that some grand sentiment or noble thought will hunt him out, and surprise his soul with a disinterested emotion. In view of this fact, a bigot, who desires to be a man of the tenth century, who strives conscientiously to narrow his intellect and shut his heart, who mumbles the exploded nonsense of past tyranny and exclusiveness, but is still forced into some accommodation to the spirit of the age in which he lives, is worthy rather of the tender commiseration than the shrewish invective of the philanthropists whom he hates, but imitates.

Now Dickens has an open sense for all the liberal influences of his time, and commonly surveys human nature from the position of charity and love. For the foibles of character he has a sort of laughing toleration; and goodness of heart, no matter how overlaid with ludicrous weaknesses, has received from him its strongest and subtlest manifestations. He not only makes us love our kind in its exhibitions of moral beauty, but also when frailties mingle with its excellence. Distinguishing, with the instinctive tact of genius, the moral differences of persons and actions, and having a nicely-adjusted scale of the degrees of folly and wickedness,

not one of his characters is just as wise or as foolish, as good or as bad, as another ; and he also contrives to effect that reconciliation of charity and morality, by which our sympathies with weakness and toleration of error never run into a morbid sentimentality. He deals in no sophistries to make evil appear good, and the worse the better reason. He does not, as Bulwer is apt to do, dress up a crowd of sharpers and adulterers in the purple and fine linen of rhetoric, and then demand us to wish them well in their business ; — an example of abstinence from a common peccadillo of romancers, worthy of especial praise in an age which appreciates George Sand and Dumas. If he refrains from thus superadding noble sentiments to animal appetites, he evolves, with a sagacity in which he is only excelled by Wordsworth, beautiful and heroic qualities from humble souls, disguised though they may be in unsightly forms, and surrounded by grotesque accompaniments. He makes the fact that happiness and virtue are not confined to any one class a reality to the mind ; and by shedding over his pictures the consecrations of a heart full of the kindest sympathies,

“Rustic life and poverty
Grow beautiful beneath his touch.”

Kit Nubbles, in the *Old Curiosity Shop*, is a pertinent example, among numerous others, of this searching humanity of Dickens. Here is a boy, rough, uneducated, ill-favored, the son of a washerwoman, the very opposite of a common novelist's idea of the interesting, with a name which at once suggests the ludicrous ; yet, as enveloped in the loving humor of Dickens, he becomes a person of more engrossing interest and affection than a thousand of the stereotyped heroes of fiction. We not only like him, but the whole family, Mrs. Nubbles, Jacob, the baby, and all ; and yet nothing is overcharged in the description, and every circumstance calculated to make Kit an object for laughter is freely used. The materials for numberless characters equally as interesting are within the reach of all novelists ; but most of them are ridden by some nightmare of dignity or gentility, which compels them to pass by the hero in the alley for some piece of etiquette and broadcloth in the drawing-room. It is not the least of Dickens's merits, that he excelled all his contemporaries, not by attempting to rival them on their own selected

vantage ground, but by availing himself of matter which they deemed worthy only of pitying contempt. He introduced the people of England to its aristocracy; and though there were not wanting dainty and vulgar spirits to call his novels "low," he soon not only gained the popular voice, but he overthrew the fashionable novelists in their own circles, and his Wellers and Swivellers, edging their way into boudoirs and parlors, supplanted Pelhams and Cecils in the estimation of countesses.

In thus representing life and character, there are two characteristics of his genius which startle every reader by their obviousness and power, his humor and pathos; but, in respect to the operation of these qualities in his delineations, critics have sometimes objected that his humor is apt to run into fantastic exaggeration, and his pathos into sentimental excess. Indeed, in regard to his humorous characters, it may be said that the vivid intensity with which he conceives them, and the overflowing abundance of joy and merriment which spring instinctively up from the very foundations of his being at the slightest point of the ludicrous, sometimes lead him to the very verge of caricature. He seems himself to be taken by surprise as his glad and genial fancies throng into his brain, and to laugh and exult with the beings he has called into existence in the spirit of a man observing, not creating. Squeers and Pecksniff, Sim Tappertit and Mark Tapley, Tony Weller and old Joe Willet, although painted with such distinctness that we seem to see them with the bodily eye, we still feel to be somewhat overcharged in the description. They are caricatured more in appearance than reality, and if grotesque in form, are true and natural at heart. Such caricature as this is to character what epigram is to fact, — a mode of conveying truth more distinctly by suggesting it through a brilliant exaggeration. When we say of a man, that he goes for the greatest good of the greatest number, but that the greatest number to him is number one, we express the fact of his selfishness as much as though we said it in a literal way. The mind of the reader unconsciously limits the extravagance into which Dickens sometimes runs, and, indeed, discerns the actual features and lineaments of the character shining the more clearly through it. Such extravagance is commonly a powerful stimulant to accurate percep-

tion, especially to readers who lack fineness and readiness of intellect. It is not that caricature which has no foundation but in

"The extravagancy
And crazy ribaldry of fancy ;"

but caricature based on the most piercing insight into actual life ; so keen, indeed, that the mind finds relief or pleasure in playing with its own conceptions. Shakspeare often condescends to caricature in this way, and so do Cervantes, Hogarth, Smollett, and Scott. Though it hardly approaches our ideal of fine characterization, it has its justification in the almost universal practice of men whose genius for humorous delineation cannot be questioned.

That Dickens is not led into this vein of exaggeration by those qualities of wit and fancy which make the caricaturist, is proved by the solidity with which his works rest on the deeper powers of imagination and humor. A caricaturist rarely presents any thing but a man's peculiarity, but Dickens always presents the man. He so preserves the keeping of character, that every thing said or done by his personages is either on a level with the original conception or develops it. They never go beyond the pitch of thought or feeling by which their personality is limited. Thus, Tony Weller, whose round fat body seems to roll about in a sea of humor, makes us laugh at his sayings as much because he says them, as for any merriment they contain in themselves. His oddities of remark are sufficiently queer to excite laughter, but they receive their peculiar unction from his conception of his own importance and his belief in the unreachable depths of his own wisdom. Mr. Pickwick compliments the intelligence of his son Sam. "Werry glad to hear of it, sir," he replies : "I took a great deal o' pains in his eddication, sir ; let him run the streets when he was very young, and shift for hisself. It's the only way to make a boy sharp, sir." His infallibility in matters relating to matrimony and widows is a good instance of the method in which a novelist may produce ludicrous effects by emphasizing an oddity of opinion, and at the same time connect it with the substance of character. When Sam sends the valentine to Mary, the old man's forecasting mind sees the consequences, and he bursts out in that affecting rebuke, — "To see you married, Sammy, to see you a deluded

victim, and thinkin' in your innocence it's all werry capital. It's a dreadful trial to a father's feelin's, that 'ere, Sammy." He is troubled by an obstinate suspicion that he himself is especially marked out as an object for the machinations of widows. In a contemptuous account of a journey he made on a railroad, he says, "I was locked up in a close carriage with a living widdur; and I believe it was only because we was alone, and there was no clergyman in the conveyance, that that are widdur didn't marry me before we reached the half-way station." He is a coachman of forty years standing, and accordingly has a wise scorn of all railroads. "As for the ingein," he says, "as is always a pourin' out red hot coals at night, and black smoke in the day, the sensiblest thing it does, in my opinion, is ven there's something in the vay, and it sets up that frightful scream vich seems to say, now here's two hundred and forty passengers in the werry greatest extremity of danger, and here's their two hundred and forty screams in vun." He is, indeed, the very Lord Burleigh of low life; and from those paroxysms of inward chuckles, — which generally terminated in "as near an approach to a choke as an elderly gentleman can with safety sustain," — through all the variety of his sayings and doings, to his earnest exhortation that Sam should spell Weller with a V, he never loses his substantial personality, never becomes any thing but Tony Weller.

Much of Dickens's most exquisite and most exuberant humor is displayed in representing characters compounded of vanity, conceit, and assurance. His Artful Dodgers and Mr. Baileys are cases in point. They remind you of the child who ran away from his parents when he was only a year old, because he understood they intended to call him Caleb. The little, thievish, ragged Dodger, when brought before the police court, points to the judge and politely requests to be informed "who is that old file up there;" and warns the court not to keep him long, as he has an engagement to dine with the "vice-president of the House of Commons." This conceit, varied according to age and character, mingles with the other peculiarities of the two Wellers, Joe Willet, Mr. Mantalini, and a score of others. There is Sim Tappertit, the sublime apprentice, conceit and bathos embodied, who is troubled by his soul's getting into his head,

and disturbed by "inward workings after a higher calling" than making locks. Mr. Kenwigs, in *Nicholas Nickleby*, is an elderly Tappertit, whose discourse is pitched on a more uniform key of fustian. But Mr. Richard Swiveller is probably the most splendid specimen of the class, and is a fine example of the felicity with which Dickens can tread the dizziest edges of character without sinking into mere caricature. Dick is a sort of shabby Sir Harry Wildair, a reckless, feather-brained, good-natured vagabond, with no depth of guile, and whose irregularities are the result of idleness, vanity, egotism, and a great flow of spirits. With a vast opinion of his own abilities, he is still overreached by every knave he encounters, and his life is a descent from one "crusher" to another. He is so vain that he almost believes his own self-exalting lies; and he cannot possibly see things as they are. When the old grandfather is disturbed by the demands of his graceless grandson for money, Dick is very much surprised that the "jolly old grandfather should decline to fork out with that cheerful readiness, which is always so pleasant and agreeable at his time of life." His head is full of scraps of songs and plays, which he has a singular felicitous infelicity in quoting to sustain the sentiment of the moment; and his slang, ever accompanying his sentiment, is as characteristic as the soil on his linen, or the marks of time's "effacing fingers" on his flash coat. When jilted by Miss Wackles, he says, in parting, "I go away with feelings that may be conceived, but cannot be described, feeling within myself the desolating truth that my best affections have received this night a stifler;" but he then adds, from the promptings of his vanity, and with reference to his proposed suit to little Nell, "that a young girl of wealth and beauty is growing up at the present moment for me, and has requested her next of kin to propose for my hand, which, having a kindness for some members of her family, I have consented to promise. It's a gratifying circumstance, that you'll be glad to hear, that a young and lovely girl is growing into a woman expressly on my account, and is now saving up for me." Dick's imaginative vanity absolutely deceives his own senses. He calls a fight, in which his own face is damaged, a festive scene; he asks his companion in punch to pass the rosy wine; he pays for his liquor by solemnly advising the boy at

the bar never to touch spirits ; and tells a stranger, whom he designs to dupe, that the wing of friendship must not moult a feather. Sir Epicure Mammon himself hardly realizes with more fulness his gorgeous visions of gluttony and avarice, than the images of all that is unreal in dissipation succeed each other as facts in poor Dick's helter-skelter brain.

Among the various characters of Dickens there is one class, which, disagreeing in many things, agree in being the tormentors of social life. They are persons whom the law does not touch, but, compared with some of them, highway-men may be considered public benefactors. As ladies always have the precedence, we will pass over the currish attorney, Brass, and the coarse scoundrel, Squeers, the snapping, hissing hatred of Quilp, and the creamy villany of Pecksniff, in order to do fit honor to that miracle of mingled weakness, prudery, and malice, the incomparable Miss Miggs. She is an elderly maiden, who, by some strange neglect on the part of mankind, has been allowed to remain unmarried. This neglect might in some small degree be accounted for by the fact that her person and disposition came within the range of Mr. Tappertit's epithet of "scraggy." She had various ways of wreaking her hatred upon the other sex, the most cruel of which was in often honoring them with her company and discourse. Her feeling for the wrongs of woman was deep and strong, and she had been known to wish that the whole race would die off, that men might be brought to appreciate the real value of the blessings by which they set so little store ; and averred, if she could obtain a fair round number of virgins, say ten thousand, to follow her example, she would, to spite mankind, hang, drown, stab, or poison herself, with a joy past expression. When she watches at the window for the return of Sim Tappertit, with the intention of betraying him, she is described as "having an expression of face, in which a great number of opposite ingredients, such as mischief, cunning, malice, triumph, and patient expectation, were all mixed up together in a kind of physiognomical punch ;" and as composing herself to wait and listen, "like some fair ogress, who has set a trap, and was waiting for a nibble from a plump young traveller." Dickens, in this character, well represents how such seemingly insignificant malignants as Miss Miggs can

become the pest of families, and that, though full of weakness and malignity, they can be proud of their virtue and religion, and make slander the prominent element of their pious conversation.

Few novelists excel in the finer shades of character, in the exhibition of those minor traits which the eye of genius alone can detect. Much of the most refined humor of Dickens comes from his insight into the subtleties of the ludicrous. This penetration of vision is often shown when the humor seems broad even to farcical excess, and especially when he makes a transparent hypocrite speak as if he were playing a deep game. Squeers, for instance, is a vulgar rascal ; but he is aware that some men are swayed by moral and sympathetic considerations, and he accordingly adopts what he deems the language of virtue and religion, when he intends some peculiarly infamous trick. His mode of translating morality and affection into his own vocabulary of villany is richly ludicrous. When his hopeful son, Master Wackford Squeers, catches poor Smike, the exulting parent exclaims,—“ You always keep on the same path, and do things that you see your father do, and when you die you will go right slap to heaven, and be asked no questions.” Snawley and Squeers know each other to be scoundrels ; yet they ever preserve in their colloquies a clumsy affectation of sentiment and conscience. Snawley, who is hired to entrap poor Smike, effects his purpose by claiming the boy as his son. When he meets Squeers, he indulges in a commendable strain of snivelling eloquence on the beauty of natural affection. “ It only shows what natur is, sir,” said Mr. Squeers. “ She ’s a rum ’un, is natur.” “ She is a holy thing,” murmured Snawley. “ I believe you,” added Mr. Squeers with a moral sigh ; “ I should like to know how we could get along without her. Natur,” he said, growing solemn, “ is more easily conceived than described. O ! what a blessed thing, sir, to be in a state of natur.”

Brass, in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, a knave compounded of hawk and puppy, who fawns, cheats, and sentimentalizes through the whole book, and has become so accustomed to this affectation of excellence, that it always flows from his lips when he speaks without reflection. He lays a trap to make poor Kit Nubbles appear a thief, and really appears

measurelessly horror-stricken when the money is found in the boy's possession. "And this," he cries, clasping his hands, "this is the world, that turns upon its own axis, and has lunar influences, and revolutions round heavenly bodies, and various games of that sort! This is human nature, is it?" Pecksniff, again, is so thoroughly impregnated with the spirit of falsehood, that he is moral even in drunkenness, and canting even in shame and discovery.

Much of the humor of Dickens is identical with his style. In this the affluence of his fancy in suggestive phrases and epithets is finely displayed; and he often flashes the impression of a character or a scene upon the mind by a few graphic verbal combinations. When Ralph Nickleby says "God bless you," to his nephew, the words stick in his throat, as if unused to the passage. When Tigg clasped Mr. Pecksniff in the dark, that worthy gentleman "found himself collared by something which smelt like several damp umbrellas, a barrel of beer, a cask of warm brandy and water, and a small parlor full of tobacco smoke, mixed." Mrs. Todgers, when she desires to make Ruth Pinch know her station, surveys her with a look of "genteel grimness." A widow of a deceased brother of Martin Chuzzlewit is described as one, who, "being almost supernaturally disagreeable, and having a dreary face, a bony figure, and a masculine voice, was, in right of these qualities, called a strong-minded woman." Mr. Richard Swiveller no sooner enters a room, than the nostrils of the company are saluted by a strong smell of gin and lemon-peel. Mr. George Chuzzlewit, a person who over fed himself, is sketched as a gentleman with such an obvious disposition to pimples, that "the bright spots on his cravat, the rich pattern of his waistcoat, and even his glittering trinkets, seemed to have broken out upon him, and not to have come into existence comfortably." Felicities like these Dickens squanders with a prodigality which reduces their relative value, and makes the generality of style-mongers poor indeed.

It is difficult to say whether Dickens is more successful in humor or pathos. Many prefer his serious to his comic scenes. It is certain that his genius can as readily draw tears as provoke laughter. Sorrow, want, poverty, pain, and death; the affections which cling to earth and those which

rise above it, he represents always with power and often with marvellous skill. His style, in the serious moods of his mind, has a harmony of flow which often glides unconsciously into metrical arrangement ; and is full of those words

“ Which fall as soft as snow on the sea,
And melt in the heart as instantly.”

One source of his pathos is the intense and purified conception he has of moral beauty, of that beauty which comes from a thoughtful brooding over the most solemn and affecting realities of life. The character of little Nell is an illustration. The simplicity of this creation, framed as it is from the finest elements of human nature, and the unambitious mode of its development through the motley scenes of the Old Curiosity Shop, are calculated to make us overlook its rare merit as a work of high poetic genius. Amid the wolfish malignity of Quilp, the sugared meanness of Brass, the roaring conviviality of Swiveller, amid scenes of selfishness and shame, of passion and crime, this delicate creation moves along, unsullied, purified, pursuing the good in the simple earnestness of a pure heart, gliding to the tomb as to a sweet sleep, and leaving in every place that her presence beautifies the marks of celestial footprints. Sorrows such as hers, over which so fine a sentiment sheds its consecrations, have been well said to be ill-bartered for the garishness of joy ; “ for they win us softly from life, and fit us to die smiling.”

In addition to this refined perception of moral beauty, he has great tragic power. It would be useless, in our limits, to attempt giving illustrations of his closeness to nature in delineating the deeper passions ; his profound observation of the workings of the soul when stained with crime and looking forward to death ; his skill in gifting remorse, fear, avarice, hatred, and revenge with their appropriate language ; and his subtle appreciation of the influence exercised by different moods of the mind in modifying the appearances of external objects. In these the poet always appears through the novelist, and we hardly know whether imagination or observation contributes most to the effect.

We have not much space to refer to *Dombey and Son*, the last completed novel of Dickens, except to remark that it illustrates those peculiarities of his genius observable in his

other works, with a little more certainty of touch in ideal delineation. It is a fresh creation of his unexhausted mind, in which the old manner is reproduced to introduce new matter. Here, as in his other novels, the characters are every thing and the story nothing; but the characters are sufficiently original, various, and numerous to compensate for far greater defects of plot and design. Captain Cuttle, Bunsby, Sol Gills, Major Bagstock, Pinch, Toodle, Toots, Mrs. Chick, Susan Nipper, Lucretia Tox, Rob, the lady whose husband invested in the Peruvian mines, not to mention others, are personages whose acquaintance once made is never broken. The beauty and pathos of the work cluster around Paul and Florence, and in these exquisite creations Dickens has exceeded the previous promise of his powers. The defects of the novel are partly owing to the ingrained peculiarities of the author, and partly to his mode of publication. Every part he is compelled to make interesting and effective in itself, without due regard to the general impression of the whole, and accordingly he often overdoes his humorous scenes, and reduces events to incidents. Some of the characters, also, refer to persons with whom he has not sufficient imaginative sympathy to delineate vitally. Mr. Carker is hardly equal to the stereotyped villain of Mr. James, and Dombey and Edith are blocks of painted wood. The whole description of them is external, without any vision into their natures. The rich abundance of humor, pathos, and character, so profusely scattered over the work, can hardly blind the simplest reader to the fact that the author always fails when he departs from the landmarks of his genius, and attempts the delineation of persons whose natures have been essentially modified by fashion, by convention, by worldliness, by morbid sentiment and passion. Villains, autocrats, fashionable people, misanthropes, sentimentalists, and young ladies, are but faintly gifted with human nature as sketched by Mr. Dickens, for they lie altogether out of the sphere of his healthy and genial genius.

In closing these desultory remarks on Dickens, and the department of literature of which he is the greatest living representative, we cannot refrain from expressing a regret that we have not a class of novels illustrative of American life and character, which does some justice to both. Novelists we have in perilous abundance, as Egypt had locusts;

some of them unexcelled in the art of preparing a dish of fiction by a liberal admixture of the horrible and sentimental ; and some few who display talents and accomplishments of a higher order ; but a series of national novels, illustrative of the national life, the production of men penetrated with an American spirit without being Americanisms, we can hardly plume ourselves upon possessing. The American has heretofore appeared in romance chiefly to be libelled or caricatured. He has been represented as an acute knave, expressing the sentiments of a worldling in the slang of an ale-house, and principally occupied in peddling Connecticut nutmegs, wooden clocks, and tin ware. That Sam Slick, Nimrod Wildfire, and the Ethiopian Minstrels do not comprehend the whole wealth and raciness of life as it is in the North, the South, and the West, might easily be demonstrated if a man of power would undertake the task. But one would almost suppose, from hearing the usual despairing criticism of the day, that in the United States the national novel was an impossible creation. Are there, then, no materials here for the romantic and heroic, — nothing over which poetry can lovingly hover, — nothing of sorrow for pathos to convert into beauty, — no fresh individualities of disposition over which humor, born of pathos, can pour its floods of genial mirth, — no sweet household ties, no domestic affections, no high thoughts, no great passions, no sorrow, sin, and death ? Has our past no story to tell ? Is there nothing of glory in the present, nothing of hope in the future ? In no country, indeed, is there a broader field opened to the delineator of character and manners than in our own land. Look at our society, the only society where the whole people are alive, — alive with intelligence and passion, — every man's individual life mingling with the life of the nation, — avarice, cruelty, pride, folly, ignorance, in a ceaseless contest with great virtues, and noble aims, and thoughts that reach the stars. In the noise and tumult of that tremendous struggle, a man of genius not blinded by its dust or deafened by its din, at once an actor in life and a spectator of it, might discover the materials of the deepest tragedy and the finest and broadest humor ; might hear amid the roar and confusion, the "still, sad music of humanity ;" might see, through all the rancor and madness of partisan warfare, the slow evolution of right

principles ; might send his soul along that tide of impetuous passion in which novelties are struggling with prejudices, without being overwhelmed in its foaming flood ; and in the comprehensive grasp of his intellect might include all classes, all sects, all professions, making them stand out on his luminous page in the clear light of reality, doing justice to all by allowing each its own costume and language, compelling Falsehood to give itself the lie, and Pride to stand abased before its own image, and guided in all his pictures of life and character by a spirit at once tolerant, just, generous, humane, and national.

ART. VI. — *The Prometheus and Agamemnon of Æschylus, translated into English Verse.* By HENRY WILLIAM HERBERT. Cambridge: John Bartlett. 1849. 12mo. pp. 156.

THE plays of Æschylus have intrinsic difficulties, growing out of the peculiar character of the poet, as well as outward difficulties, belonging to the state of the text, which make the translator's task a problem of great labor. The first class of difficulties occur, more or less, in all of the remaining pieces of the greatest master of the Attic tragedy ; the second are found less in the *Prometheus*, and most of all in the *Agamemnon*. The former play, for reasons all of which we do not probably know, has fared much better at the hands of the copyists and scholiasts ; while the latter has been so corrupted that, in many places, a remedy is utterly hopeless ; conjectural approximations being all that is possible with regard to the text, and harmonizing or comparative interpretation all that is possible with regard to the sense.

Besides the accidental and inevitable corruptions wrought by time, and the carelessness or ignorance of copyists, there were other changes traceable to a higher origin ; namely, to the Greek Dramatic poets themselves, who often retouched and reproduced their pieces, and to their successors, who worked over again the productions of the older masters, and adapted them to the requirements of the contemporary stage.